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LINCOLN

Address Delivered at Quincy, Illinois, Tuesday, October 13, 1908, before the State Historical Society of Illinois, and the Lincoln-Douglas Semi-Centennial Society.

BY GEORGE E. ADAMS.

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LINCOLN.

We are gathered here today midway in a presidential campaign. We come together, Democrats and Republicans, to stand for a while on common ground. We come here to honor the memory of two great sons of Illinois, one a Democrat and the other a Republican, who, 50 years ago, met here in the most momentous political debate of modern times. That debate was momentous because the presidential campaign which followed it was merely the repetition on a thousand platforms of the arguments advanced by Lincoln and Douglas here, and that presidential campaign was the last trial at the bar of public opinion, the last trial before the appeal to arms, of the question of free territories, a question, the right settlement of which was necessary to the development of the greatest republic the world has known, that republic whose present power and influence upon other nations has gone far beyond the brightest dreams of the most ardent American patriot of fifty years ago.

In the history of this country there have been ^{such} great political debates. Each has had a logical connection with the others. Each has tended directly or indirectly to bring about a more perfect union of the American people.

When the thirteen colonies declared their independence of Great Britain, they were independent of each other. They were jealous of each other. They were jealous of any common control. To defend themselves against a common enemy they formed a loose confederation. It worked badly during the war, and worse after the war. Then the wise men of all the states came together and made the Constitution, substantially as we have it to-day. That Constitution has won the admiration of statesmen all over the world, yet it was not easy to induce the several states to adopt it. So came the first great political debate to which I have referred. Hamilton, Madison and Jay, in the Federalist, urged the adoption of the Constitution. Other public men of eminence and ability urged its rejection. It was adopted, and thus the first step was taken toward a perfect union of the American people.

In exchange

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More than a generation passed. The question of the meaning of the Constitution still remained. Calhoun of South Carolina insisted that the union under the Constitution was after all only a confederation of sovereign states, each state having the right to nullify the acts of the general government and peaceably to withdraw from the union. So came the second great political debate, culminating in Webster's reply to Hayne in the United States Senate. That question was settled not by the eloquence of Webster but by the stalwart patriotism of President Andrew Jackson, who declared that nullification was treason, and that he would hang traitors as high as Haman. Thus was taken the second step toward a perfect union of the American people.

Another generation passed. The slavery question, settled for a time by compromise, became an open question once more. The slave states and the free states strove in eager rivalry to control the general government through the control of new states to be formed out of western territories. The question of slavery in the territories became the question of the day. It was a Constitutional question. Did the fathers of the republic mean that slavery should be confined to the states where it already existed? Did they mean that the territories should be saved for free labor by the exclusion of slavery? So came the third great political debate, in memory of which we come together today.

That that debate did not immediately lead to a more perfect union of the American people was not the fault of Abraham Lincoln. His expectation was that slavery would come to be recognized, not as a national institution but as a state institution. It would not be allowed to spread into the territories, but would be protected in the states where it existed. He thought that thus the bitterness of the slavery question would disappear, and that in the course of time, perhaps, as he said in one of his speeches, in the course of a hundred years slavery would disappear in the South as it had already disappeared in the North.

It was not an unreasonable hope, but we were not to be freed from slavery and the slavery question on such easy terms. Thousands of millions of dollars, and an inestimable treasure

in the life blood of the flower of a generation of Americans, South and North, made up the penalty which we had to pay for the sin of those who introduced slavery into this country.

Now another generation has passed away. The bitterness of the Civil war has gone. By the elimination of slavery there has come to exist a more perfect union of the American people than ever existed before, a more perfect national union than any great nation in the world has ever shown, except perhaps Japan.

It is one of the notable facts in the history of the nineteenth century that this American nation, which European observers declared incapable of real national feeling, partly because of the difference between North and South and partly because it is largely made up by heterogeneous immigration from all the countries of northern Europe, is in reality more homogeneous in thought, feeling and manner than any nation of Europe. It is also more homogeneous in language. It may be that a highly educated Englishman talks English better than a highly educated American, but it is certain that the people of the United States, taken as a whole, speak their language with more uniform accuracy than the people of the British Islands, or the people of France, Germany or Italy.

Our homogeneous character, which makes the opinion of the people of the United States the greatest political power in the world, is due partly to our railways and our newspapers. It is due to our habit of travelling and our habit of discussing the same public questions from one end of the country to the other. It is due to our institutions. It is due to the union of the American people and therefore, so far as it is due to any one man, it is due to Abraham Lincoln.

How can we hope to do justice to a character and career so great as his in a mere occasional address. His name has come to be one of the great names of history. To the oppressed of all nations he is the friend of humanity, the great emancipator. To statesmen of all countries he is the wise executive, who with a hand as strong as it was gentle guided his country in an hour of supreme peril; while to literary men and lovers

of literature in English speaking countries, he is one of the great masters of the greatest language in the world.

Let us not try today to analyze his character or his political genius. Let us try rather to recall some of the circumstances which enabled this self taught American, born in dire poverty, reared in rude surroundings, at the age of forty-five years an Illinois lawyer little known outside of the state, to rise in the next ten years to a height of fame not achieved by human endeavor once in a century.

Let us recall the situation and character fifty years ago of the State of Illinois, the arena of the great debate. They had much to do with Lincoln's career. The country of the Illinois, as it used to be called, seems to have been marked out by nature to serve as a bond of union between the North and the South. It was so even in geological times. Geologists tell us that in the remote past the head of the Gulf of Mexico was here. They tell us that the mighty river of the North, which now sends its comparatively scanty stream over Niagara and finds its way into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, here poured its icy waters into a tropic sea. Traces of this ancient union of North and South are still to be found among the wild flowers of Illinois. Botanists tell us that around the head of Lake Michigan in north-eastern Illinois and northwestern Indiana plants allied to arctic species and plants allied to tropical or subtropical species are found in a variety and close proximity hardly to be seen elsewhere in the world.

So it was in historical times. When the French settled Canada in the North and Louisiana in the South, here was the pathway between them. The projected deepwater channel from Lake Michigan to the Gulf, soon, I trust, to be realized, will be the fulfillment of a prophecy made hundreds of years ago. And so when Illinois was admitted to the Union, its boundaries were established with the deliberate purpose of making the new state a bond of political union between the North and the South. In the ordinance of 1787 for the government of the Northwest Territory it was provided that in the western division of the territory Congress might lay out one or more states in that portion thereof lying north of an east and

west line drawn through the extreme southerly bend of Lake Michigan. The bill for the admission of Illinois, as reported by the Committee on Territories, adopted this east and west line as the northern boundary of the state. In that form the bill was placed on the calendar of the Committee of the whole. If it had become law without amendment the career of Abraham Lincoln would have been impossible. When the bill was reached on the calendar, Judge Pope, our territorial delegate, proposed an amendment. He proposed to fix the northern boundary of the state about fifty marine miles farther north. He gave his reasons. Illinois, he said, is connected with the South by the navigation of the Ohio and the Mississippi. It has been settled mainly from the South. If the northern boundary is fixed where the Committee proposes the new state will be essentially a southern state. If discord arises between North and South and disunion is threatened Illinois will go with the South and the Union will be dissolved. But if we give Illinois a part of the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan, with a convenient port on that lake, she will be attached to the North and the east by the navigation of the Great Lakes, as well as attached to the South by the Ohio and the Mississippi. Then Illinois will be not a Northern state or a Southern state, but both in one, and might at some future time be the keystone to the perpetuity of the Union. The amendment was adopted and the bill passed. Illinois was thus, at her very birth, pledged to maintain the Union. How well she has redeemed that pledge, and at what cost, the nation knows.

"Abraham Lincoln's name appears,
Grant and Logan and our tears,
Illinois."

Into the new state poured two streams of immigration, one from the North, the other from the South. Northern Illinois was largely settled from New England and New York. Southern Illinois, though its first American settler was a Massachusetts man, was mainly settled from Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland. By 1860 it had become the fourth state of the Union, northern and southern at the same time, and the North connected with the South by the Illinois and

Michigan canal and the Illinois Central railroad. It could fairly claim to be the representative state of the whole nation. We are the representative state today. Situated near the geographical centre and the centre of population, and of railway transportation, great in agriculture, commerce and manufactures, we represent more than any other state the industrial life of this country. It is not without reason that the author of a recent magazine article calls Illinois "the heart of the United States."

Fifty years ago our industries were as yet undeveloped, but in political sentiment it could even then be called the representative of the whole American people. Every phase of feeling and opinion on the slavery question the great question of the day, was to be found in Illinois. In no other state could the great debate on free territories be more fitly made than here, in order to be presented two years later to the people of the United States.

As there was no state in which this great debate could have been more fitly held, so there was no man in Illinois better prepared to be the champion of free territories than Abraham Lincoln. Just how he became fitted for this great work we do not know. Some of his biographers declare that his career was an enigma. They mean that they can not see in his life, up to 1854, any adequate explanation of the life he lived afterwards. Certain it is that when stirred by the reopening of the slavery question his daily life became a daily education for a great career, and the Lincoln-Douglas debate of 1858 was a preparation for the presidency. It is a noteworthy fact that this intellectual struggle between two patriotic citizens of Illinois was the training of one of them for a contest with the enemies of his country. The same difficulties which Lincoln had to face in this debate with Douglas ^{may} ~~was~~ analogous at least to the difficulties which beset him in the White House, while the qualities of mind and heart which sustained him here sustained him through the four dreadful years of his presidential term.

Here he had confronting him the eloquence of Douglas, the ablest political debator of his time, the most distinguished Democrat, the most popular man in the United States, his mind

trained by long experience in public life to every rhetorical art of attack or defense, his style trenchant, his voice musical and sonorous as an organ tone, his bearing imperial, his manner fascinating to all who came within its influence. There in the White House he had confronting him the military genius of Lee and Longstreet and Stonewall Jackson, and the devoted valor of the men who followed them.

Here he had around him the people of Illinois, opposed by a large majority to the spread of slavery, but doubtful how to arrest it, and hampered by old political associations, free soil Democrats, free soil Whigs, Henry Clay compromise Whigs, Abolitionists, each faction jealous of every other. There he had around him the plain people of the United States, resolved to maintain the Union, horrified by the thought of Civil war, attached to the Constitution, anxious for the Constitution if the Union were to be maintained by force, New England radical, the city of New York fearful for its commercial interests, and the border states watching every word and act of the administration to see whether an abolition war would drive them to follow the seceding states.

Here in Illinois he had behind him the illboding whispers of discouraging friends, some saying that he went too far and too fast, others that he was ruining the cause by not going far enough, and the leading Republican editor of the United States openly espousing the cause of his antagonist. There in the White House he had behind him and around him like a swarm of gadflies the crowd of place hunters, each anxious to save the Union by accepting an office, and the pestiferous throng of senators, congressmen, editors, ministers of the gospel, and reformers of all sorts, each anxious to show this backwoods Illinois president how to run the government of the United States and carry on a great Civil war.

Through all those weary years he was sustained by the same qualities of mind and heart which had made themselves felt here in Illinois. His political sagacity, his foresight of the trend of opinions and events, and above all the sure feeling in this man of the people of what was passing in the minds of the people of the United States were so marvellous that many

explained them by the direct inspiration of the Almighty. Courage he showed higher and more serene than the courage of Washington, tested by trials which Washington never knew. He was always ready to take the responsibility of his words and acts, always ready to bear on his own shoulders the blame of failure, always ready to share with others the honor of success. He directed the course of the great debate in Illinois against the remonstrances of his party friends older in public life than he.

Arrived in Washington he was visited by members of the so-called Peace Commission, urging compromise with secession. They expected to find an ignorant and timid man, borne down with a sense of awful responsibility. They were astonished and dismayed to hear him declare with quiet self possession, "My course is as plain as a turnpike road. It is pointed out by the Constitution. I have no doubt which way I must go."

When his accomplished Secretary of State, once a governor of New York and twelve years a Senator of the United States, laid out for Lincoln the policy which should be followed by the new administration, he was reminded at once, and never forgot, that the man who had been elected president was to be the real president for the next four years.

When editors and clergymen of his own party urged immediate emancipation of the slaves early in the war, he refused, because the time was not yet come, and when the time did come and he laid his proclamation before the members of his cabinet he told them not to discuss the policy of the act, but only the time and manner of publication. From first to last he was the real head of his cabinet, the soul of his own administration.

He was a master of men, but that which makes his memory dear to the hearts of his countrymen was neither his intellect nor his courage, but the kindness of his nature, which embraced even those who were arrayed in arms against the government. The world will not forget, says his biographer, that the greatest Civil war in history was conducted by the most humane of men, and when he fell none had more cause to deplore his death

than those against whom for four years he had employed all the military resources of the nation.

Kindliness of nature and the sense of humor which so often goes with it are not usually reckoned part of the equipment of a statesman. Lincoln's humor was perhaps his best known trait during his youth and early manhood. It flashed out from time to time even during the dark days of the Civil war when the lines in his face were growing deeper from day to day and his soul was heavy with the thought of the boys in the hospitals and the widows and orphans, North and South. When a friend expostulated with him for some humorous sally, he replied, "I know you to be an earnest, true man, but if I could not find vent for my feelings in this way, I should die."

Perhaps Lincoln's sense of humor had a higher significance for the American people than Lincoln himself knew. An eminent man referring to another eminent man, once, spoke of his humorous wisdom. It is a happy phrase. There is wisdom in humor and the highest political wisdom is impossible without it. Humor, says a great essayist, implies sympathy with human nature. It implies the power of putting one's self in the other man's place. It implies the power of understanding the thoughts and feelings of all sorts and conditions of men. A sense of humor, therefore, helps the statesman by keeping him in touch with the people. In a government like ours, where the people do rule, whatever party is in power the statesman must keep in touch with the people or he must fail, however brilliant or learned he may be. Lincoln was always in touch with the people, though he was often at odds with those who supposed that they were the leaders of the people.

When Lincoln, at Gettysburg, gave to the world that address which the world will not let die, he reminded us that we cannot fitly consecrate the ground where brave men have fallen unless at the same time we dedicate ourselves to the cause for which they have given their lives; and we, gathered here in memory of the great debate of fifty years ago, ought to devote ourselves, as far as we may, to the promotion of the perfect union of the American people which was near to the hearts of Lincoln and of Douglas both.

Division between section and section we need not fear. Maine and California, Minnesota and Texas are today cordial members of a real sisterhood of states. There is not a county in South Carolina in which disunion would not be laughed to scorn. Need we fear a division of the nation on other lines than sectional? Need we fear that division between class and class which was predicted by the political philosophers of Europe as the inevitable doom of the republic? When Guizot, the French historian, heard of the outbreak of our Civil war he wrote to a friend that our republic had come to its natural and predestined end. Our institutions were to blame. We had existed thus far by the influence of the virtues of the first generation of American statesmen. Macaulay, the English historian, declared that the American people would be strong and free so long as they continued to be poor. When wealth came, there would come the division into rich and poor. Then would come the demagogue, setting the poor against the rich, the farmer against the merchant, the artizan against the banker. So would come industrial confusion and out of the confusion would come the man on horseback, the dictator, and our republic would merge in an empire, as had the republic of ancient Rome.

Now we have become the richest nation in the world. We are richer than any other great nation ever was, but we are not divided, and there is no sign that we shall ever be divided into a class of the rich and a class of the hopeless poor as Macaulay predicted. Millionaires we have in plenty. Nearly every one of them is the son of a poor man. Nearly every one of them has reason to believe that his grandson will lead a life of the same strenuous endeavor which to him has made life worth living. Three generations from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves is an old American saying. The wealth of the wealthy is a pittance compared with the aggregate wealth of the poor. Labor and capital are on better terms with each other here than in other countries. Their dependence on each other is more apparent here than elsewhere. The wealth of our rich men is mainly invested in industrial enterprises in the United States. These industries while they seek a foreign market for their surplus

product, are mainly engaged in supplying the demands of the American people, and the American people are in the aggregate the largest consumer and the most profitable customer in the world. American labor knows that the confidence of American capital is a better guaranty of work and wages than an Act of Congress or a political platform, while American capital without pretense of philanthropy watches the rising and falling prosperity of labor as a barometer by which to gauge the rising and falling of its own income. In another sense than that in which Saint Paul spoke we are reminded even by the market reports that we are members one of another and many members in one body. To what do we owe this condition of things which makes our government the most stable government in the world? We owe it partly to our institutions. We owe it mainly to our vast domain, the spacious home of American capital and American labor, covering nearly sixty degrees of longitude and twenty-five degrees of latitude, with a great variety of soil and climate, but with the same institutions, the same habit of life, the same language and a scale of living the highest in the world. We owe it to the unity of the Republic. We owe it largely to the policy, character and influence of Abraham Lincoln.

He is the greatest of our great men. He is the representative American. His place in the affections of the generations to come will be a larger place than mere eloquence or literary genius can win. His fame will be higher than mere military glory.

“Great Captains with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for an hour,
But at last silence comes,
Then all these pass; and standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
That kindly, earnest, brave, fore-seeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.”





